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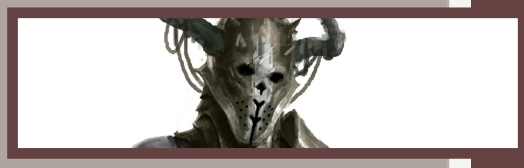
Chapter 1 Page 04

Thumbs, Silhouettes & Special Brushes By Darren Yeow



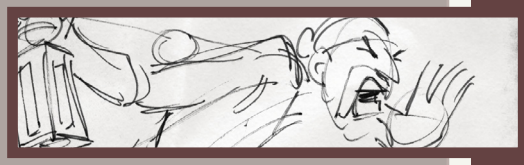
Chapter 2 Page 12

Visual Brainstorming – Variations on a Theme By Bruno Werneck



Chapter 3 Page 20

Speed Painting & Concept Design By Björn Hurri



Chapter 4 Page 28

Dynamic & Exaggerated Poses By Mark McDonnell



Chapter 5 Page 36

Camera Placement, Framing, Fore-shortening & Distortion By David Smit




CHAPTER ONE
Thumbs, Silhouettes & Special Brushes By Darren Yeow

Chapter 1: Thumbs, Silhouettes & Special Brushes

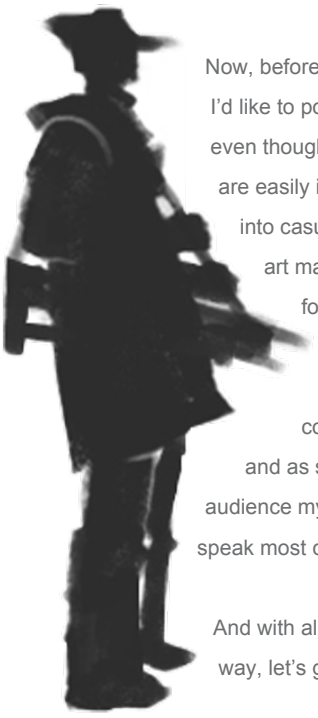
Software Used: Photoshop



Introduction

Creating artwork is a wonderful gift, a pleasure that I cherish and indulge in on a daily basis, because it is both my favourite past time and because it is also my profession. For myself, and undoubtedly many of you reading this, there is no comparable experience of diving stylus first into an alternate reality, indulging our coolest ideas and dancing the tango with plain old creativity. However, speak to any artist and I'm sure they'll vouch for the fact that it is also an activity that can drive many of us to the heights of frustration. This is especially true if we don't have battle tested procedures and processes that we can rely on when inspiration and a loose brush alone aren't enough.

This topic delves into the very heart of the creative process, the initial flowing of ideas onto paper when we feel our ideas are strongest and also gives insight into workflows you can rely on when your art director comes back to you and says, "Give me something more!"



Now, before we begin, I'd like to point out that even though these ideas are easily incorporated into casual or fine art making, my focus (and my experience) is that of a commercial artist, and as such this is the audience my writing will speak most clearly to.

And with all that out of the way, let's get started!

Before you get started

If you know me, then you'll know what I am going to tell you to begin with – your research! Whether you know or understand the subject matter intimately or not, you need to fill your consciousness with new information on a consistent basis in order to provide fresh ideas/ reminders for your images … or you'll risk growing stale and creating highly derivative art.

What does this mean in a practical sense? Well, in today's age of blogs, online articles, image archives, forums and the like, this essentially means jumping on the internet and using your favourite search engine to source out some visuals to kick start your engine. Some of my favourites are listed below – it certainly isn't exhaustive, but these are typically all I need to find good references:

- **www.Google.com**
- **www.ConceptArt.org**
- **www.Flickr.com**

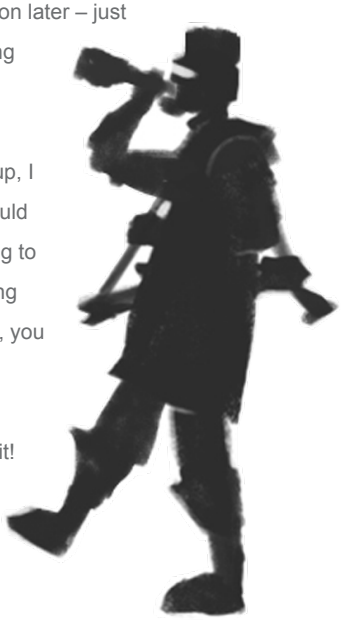
If you don't have the internet (in which case I'm not entirely sure how you got this e-magazine in the first place) then it means a little more leg work: going to your local library, picking up a newspaper, magazine, trade journal, or watching a movie and stockpiling your mental arsenal from there can also be a good start. Whichever resources you choose to draw upon, just make sure you use it as inspiration only and don't plagiarise the work. That would be unscrupulous and does not help your skill level grow; indeed it will more likely lower your confidence in your own abilities.

Thumbnail Sketching

So you're given your brief, you experience that irrevocable moment in which you are delivered your design task and the synapses start firing off instantly and a myriad of images start flashing through your mind.

Now what?

Well, the best thing to do is to start getting your ideas into visual form, whether on paper or digitally. Don't talk about it with other people, we're not professors of literature, there's plenty of time for discussion later – just get your pen moving and don't stop!



Should you warm up, I hear you ask? Should I practice something to get the blood flowing through my fingers, you might say?

Nope, don't sweat it!



Fig.01

You know what? The first few will probably be really bad, just accept it and have the confidence to know that the more little sketches you do, the better they will be as you go along.

It is important to understand that how it looks right now is of little importance at this early stage, they are representational shorthand ideas for yourself that will lead to more developed ideas down the track. It helps to imagine yourself as a documentary agent, trying to capture the images that are flashing before your mind's eye.

Quick Initial Sketches – So to start off (Fig.01), I create a relatively small canvas on my screen in Photoshop – roughly 400 pixels by 400 pixels at 72 dpi. Now, this is a fairly small size and nowhere near print quality, but because this is the digital medium I am using it doesn't really affect me as I am able to upscale at any time.

Another practicality is that the canvas does not chew memory; at such a miniscule size your brushstrokes can be as free and wild and quick as you like, with no danger of lag. Of course, with today's increasingly fast computers this tends to be less and less of an issue, but I still like to start off at a small scale so as to resist the temptation of jumping into the details immediately.

As the name would suggest, thumbnail sketches (or simply thumbnails) are very small scribbles, designed to be fast, putting down what you feel, emptying your mind of your current thoughts so that they may be replaced by more ideas, and by jotting these ideas in quick succession you are aiding the velocity of the process.

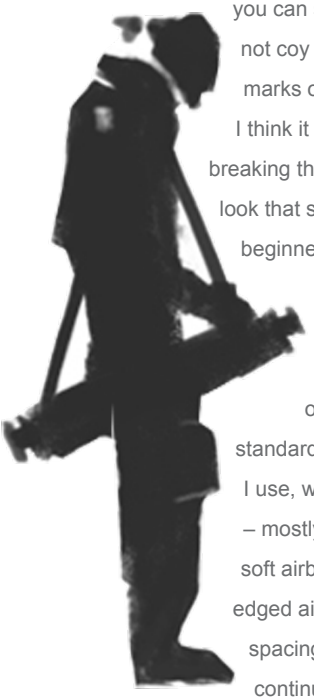
If you are wondering what sort of sketching you should use to document your ideas, or how much is too much or too little, then you're most likely not alone. The answer is that you should use as much information as you need, but as little as possible. If you feel you can sketch a character using just plain old line work, then so be it. If you need to put in some value to bring out the form, then do that. There is no single answer for everyone, and so you should document your ideas using what you feel comfortable with.



Fig.02

Please, don't be afraid to go crazy at this stage, every thought is fair game to be plotted on your sheet – in fact, some thumbs will simply be filler used to dirty up the page. I don't know about you, but a blank sheet staring me in the face is intimidating, it's saying to me, "I dare you to dirty me up … Oh no, actually I double dare ya!" To which I usually reply by throwing down a few incoherent lines to get past that initial Clean Sheet Syndrome. Once that page has been violated with scribbles, it is no longer as imposing to draw on and a mental barrier is broken, allowing your sketches to flow more freely.

Trying Out Different Types of Sketches – As you can see from Fig.02, I am not coy about creating "dirty" marks on the page – in fact I think it can go some way to breaking that computer illustrated look that so many digital art beginners seem to fall into.



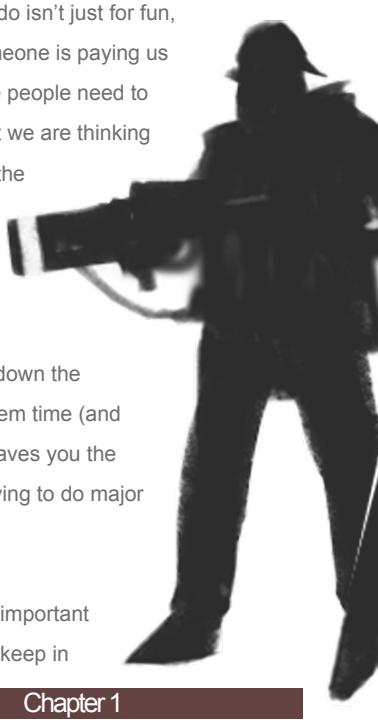
I tend to work with very simple brushes, or brushes that come standard with the programme I use, which is Photoshop – mostly a combination of soft airbrushes and harder edged airbrushes with reduced spacing so as to mimic continuous tone. I tend to use these brushes as a high-tech version of a pencil or a block of chalk, typically starting by laying large areas of tone onto the canvas before cutting back into the shapes with white.

In order to facilitate this quick process I mainly use my stylus, the spacebar to grab the canvas, and the Alt key to colour-pick the tones I want from previous laid down strokes. When you get used to it, this is a very quick method of working and allows you to put your ideas down very quickly.

You may also notice on the illustration (Fig.02) that there are some images that look very similar to each other – herein lies another of digital media's advantages: the ability to create variations simply by using the Marquee Tool and creating a new layer using the existing illustrated layer as the source. This will then allow you illustrate over the image, creating a variation side by side to the original. The beautiful thing is that it frees up your inhibition to experiment and can be done infinitely!

Now, up to this point, we've been thinking of the sketches as a personal tool – that is, an external representation of a myriad of internal ideas in an attempt to organise free-flowing thoughts into a structured pattern for our own personal use. We have part of the design in our minds and this can often cause us to stop short of creating sketches that mean anything to anyone but ourselves.

This situation would be fine if the work we are doing is only for ourselves, however, most often the art we do isn't just for fun, it's because someone is paying us to deliver. These people need to understand what we are thinking at every step of the process to reduce the likelihood of going in the wrong direction down the line – it saves them time (and money), and it saves you the frustration of having to do major rework.



So this is a very important consideration to keep in

mind (important enough that I am reiterating it) – as commercial artists, we never operate in a vacuum, our work is generally part of a greater whole, in editorial enhancing the writing or as concept art which precedes the asset building phase of game or film development. In short, we need to share our ideas effectively with other people, and most often with people who are not artists.

Cleaning Up – Looking at Fig.03 now, I have chosen to clean up this design because I feel the character has poise, balance and potential to experiment – it is also the least developed and would demonstrate the process between a rather abstract image built of large shapes and how you would begin to add in the design elements gradually.

In this case, I also increase the resolution to 1221 pixels by 657 pixels, so that I will be comfortable while adding the details. I'd also like to mention that in most of the concept art positions I have worked in, the bulk of this kind of work is done as a rough guide for the 3D artists who tend to work with dual monitor set ups, so print versions are not really required. If, however, you need to generally print off your work, stick to working on at least A4 as this will allow you sufficient detail to print off on A4 sheets.

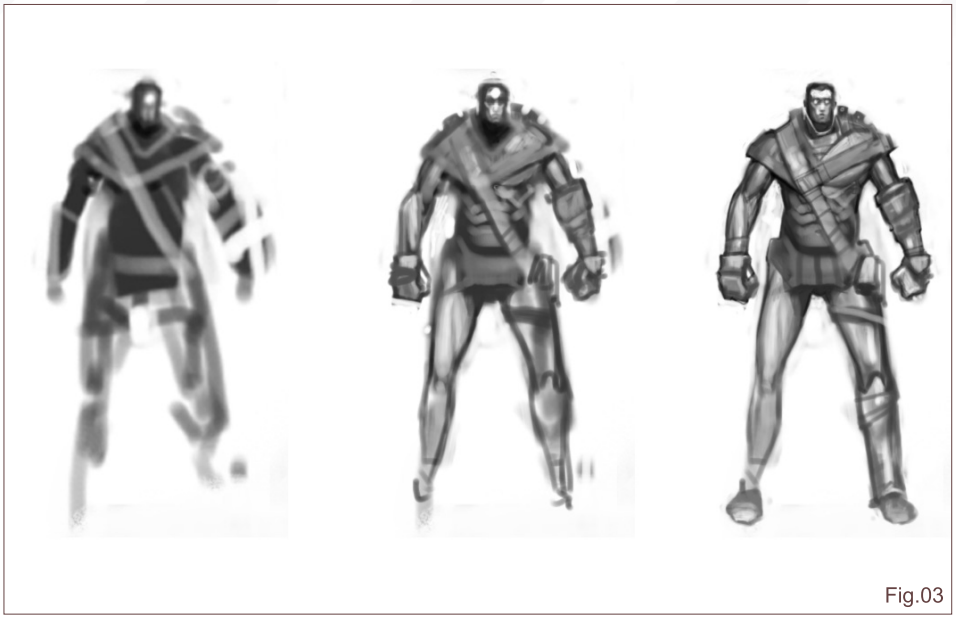


Fig.03

Silhouettes

Like everything else in art, ideation is a fluid process that does not always take the same route. Indeed I would even go as far as to encourage you to occasionally venture upon the path less travelled in order to derive new processes, new styles and new ways of thinking.

Creating silhouettes are simply another form of visual shorthand, a tool that can be used as a fore-runner to a fully fledged design besides line and tonal sketches.

Silhouette Design – As you can see from Fig.04, creating a silhouette is designing the character from the outside inwards; you are determining the features that directly influence



Fig.04



Fig.05a

the extents of the character and blanking the rest, leaving your imagination to fill in the details.

In the example you can again see the use of duplicates, allowing me to fill a page of silhouettes very quickly by using the copy-paste method. This will free up your time to work on making sure that each silhouette receives your attention, regarding their individuality and unique qualities.

Adhering to the principles of creating silhouettes is important for a number of reasons:

- It removes the temptation of spending too long on the minutiae – not being able to putter away endlessly on infinitely small details expedites the process and forces you to think of the big picture

- It enhances the amount of thought given to an object's recognisability from a distance, so a character is easily recognised from far away

- It lets you concentrate on one aspect of design at a time – you don't need to worry about anything else other than the overall shape of the silhouette, the emotional response from the viewer and whether that response is the desired effect based on the design requirements



Fig.05b

Of course, once the external shape of the character is agreed upon, it's time to fill in the internal details. This involves the reconciliation of external shapes, with associated internal objects which also serve a functional purpose for the character in question. There's no real 'right' way to go about this, but a good rule I try to keep is to concentrate on the larger shapes before going into the minute details; it's a very fluid natural progression when you think about it.

Silhouette Detailing – So here is an example of how a character's silhouette is taken from an abstract silhouette, to a fairly well fleshed-out concept (Fig.05a – b).



Fig.06

I chose this particular pose because I like its dynamic nature; I felt it had lots of possibilities to explore and so I increased the resolution and began by working in the large shapes roughly, using the same basic brush that I began with. When I was happy with the overall shapes, I began using a soft edged airbrush in order to give the shapes form and roundness, and I envisioned the light source from a frontal raised position. Picking out your light source will answer many questions regarding form, so always keep this in mind early on in the rendering process.

The advent of digital art making has many boons: the ability to revert to a prior state; the efficiency of automation; the ability to paint full colour pictures without waiting for paint to dry nor having to inhale fumes from solvents.

In the field of concept art, another very time-efficient advantage is the ability to non-destructively create numerous versions based on the same idea.

Versioning – You can see from Fig.06 that the base image is the same; however, because I have duplicated the image twice, I negate the requirement to think of new poses, and the proportions of the figure have already been taken into account with the first character on the left. This means that for the two characters on the right of the original, there is less to think about, and more effort can be put into things such as the accessories of each.
As you can imagine, the advantages are huge and very economical if you want to create a large number of variations based on a single silhouette or body type. All that is required is the duplication of the image layer you want to work with, and simply painting over the top of it.

The advantages are huge, and very economical if you want to create a large number of variations based on a single silhouette or body type. All that is required is the duplication of the image layer you want to work with and simply painting over the top of it.

Custom Brushes

These days, custom brushes seem to be a staple of most digital artists' tool boxes. They are one of the aforementioned benefits of the digital age of art making, the process is simple and makes creating repeating elements a breeze.

However, this tutorial isn't going to cover custom brushes.

Yes, I know – huge riots, controversy and all that – but the truth is I just don't use custom brushes for the idea generation process much at all (final piece artwork is a slightly different story, though). There are some artists out there who swear by them because of 'happy accidents', just as there are some, such as myself, who would rather make every stroke

deliberate. It's not that I can't use them or don't know how to make them, but I just prefer the control over my work using a regular default brush. Neither workflow is right nor wrong; it is a personal choice. My thoughts are that if you feel comfortable using something and you can deliver the results, your methods work for you! That being said, because I see such an over-reliance on custom brushes by many novice artists, I'd like to explicitly remind people reading this that a custom brush is nothing but a tool. Like all tools, there are moments when they should be used, and moments when they should not be used. Custom brushes should never be used to replace the basics of art making and, if worst came to worst, you should be able to illustrate your thumbnails and silhouettes without them at all. Once you can do this, then using custom brushes may speed up your work, but as always: basic art skills first, flash-tastic technology second.

I'm not trying to discourage the use of custom brushes, by all means I encourage you to try them as well as many other work methods, and you might just find they gel with your working style – they just don't work with mine at this current time.

Rules and Guidelines

When it comes to art, many feel that rules inhibit the artistic expression of some artists. If you want to be a commercial artist, you'll need to kick that idea right out of your head. Creating art in a commercial environment has plenty of constraints which can be bent at times, but certainly not broken, especially if you're not the art director.

These are a few that pop up frequently, so try to keep them in mind when you do your work:

- **Function before form:** It is of absolutely no value to your employer, your client or your art lead if you create art that is flash over substance. The functional value of the costume needs to be there; once it suits the purpose it was built for, then you can make it look cool. One big example is articulation; I see a lot of artists creating these hulking power suits that look cool but are completely impractical and the wearer would simply not be able to lift their arms high enough to scratch their own heads!

- **Rely on pre-existing memes to present your ideas:** Rely to an extent on what has come before in the design world. Red means stop or danger, green means go, sharp means dangerous and round and soft means harmless and user-friendly. Leverage these memes and archetypes to give credibility to your designs

- **Don't 'ape' other people's artwork:** Don't steal, copy, or plagiarise other people's designs. Just don't!

Mindset

I've always been one to insist that what goes on in the head of the art maker is equally, if not more important, than what happens at the business end of a pencil. While I've alluded in various places during the tutorial what I am thinking, here are some of my thoughts on what you should try to keep in mind while you are exploring your ideas on paper:

- You are creating many tiny inconsequential pieces of art: the more you create, the higher the likelihood that you will have within those drawings the elements of the final design

- You are unbiased towards any one design because Murphy's Law will almost always guarantee that the design that least excites you will be chosen by the art director

- Every single sketch, thumbnail, silhouette or scribble is valuable – don't erase them

- Any idea is a good idea; within each sketch holds a key that could open another door which may eventually lead to the final design

So here you are at the end of my write up. I'm sure you're itching to get to some thumbnails underway – that's if you haven't already!

I hope you've enjoyed my tutorial and hopefully picked up one or two pointers. If you have any questions or comments please feel free to send me an email.

Darren Yeow

For more from this artist contact them at:
darren@stylus-monkey.com



CHAPTER TWO

Visual Brainstorming – Variations on a Theme By Bruno Werneck



Chapter 2: Visual Brainstorming – Variations on a Theme

Software Used: Photoshop


Fig.01

Introduction

When the folks at 3DTotal contacted me to write an article on visual brainstorming for character design, I thought: What a great opportunity to show something different! Artists often spend hours, days, weeks, even months working on an illustration secluded from the world, at home or in the designated studio space. We may show our work in progress to family, friends, and sometimes we'll show our roughs to other fellow artists for feedback, to make sure we're on the right track, but no one else gets to see you making it. And when the illustration is done, we then proudly show it off, email it to friends, post the finished piece on the web, in popular online communities, let it out so the world can see via this amazing tool that connects all artists throughout the globe: the World Wide Web.

Sometimes we do get to see the process if the artist keeps files of all the work in progress until completion or even records a video of the making of it. Time-lapse videos are always cool to watch, and very informative too. But what about a recording of what went through the artist's mind? What went through his/her head before he/she sat down to create that piece of artwork? We don't see that often. We can look at someone's sketchbook, but more often than not sketchbook drawings are already intended for show, or to be posted in blogs – even sold at conventions. There's still a disconnection there: a big gap from thinking about an art piece and creating it.

Visual brainstorming is the only way to truly take a peek inside an artist's brain. And it's the language visual artists use to bridge this gap between thought and execution. Every artist does it, in one way or another. If you're an artist or an aspiring one, you may not have noticed but you do it already; when you do thumbnails on a napkin that no one but you can make up what it is, when you write notes next to these doodles (a handwriting sometimes only you can read), or when you simply research images online, saving some for reference. These studies are not for show or meant to be hung in galleries; they're for you and for you alone. You're not presenting anything to anyone, you're simply trying to funnel all the billions of ideas that are going through your brain, trying to make sense of it all, figure things out, or at least warm up for the task before you get to do it for real.


Fig.02

Inspiration

For this specific tutorial I was asked to come up with a design for a warrior. Any kind of warrior! It seemed vague at first, but it just so happened I was moving from Chicago to Los Angeles at the time, embarking on an adventurous road trip driving across the United States (with girlfriend and cat!). We took our time and spent seven days driving by some quite amazing places. At the national parks we were mesmerized by beautiful sightseeing, and witnessed vast landscapes now inhabited by men. We would often see mountains with rocks shaped in peculiar ways, caused by erosion and severe weather/climate changes. Experiencing all that helped shape the idea behind the warrior, and what the warrior was about (**Fig.01 – 02**).

I remember thinking to myself: In the past, people must've lived here, enduring these harsh conditions. Any man living in places like these has to be considered a warrior, a survivor. By then we were in South Dakota and went to see Mount Rushmore with the president portraits carved out of the mountain. Not too far from the site there was "Crazy Horse", an even bigger, more ambitious, yet to be completed sculpture of an Indian riding his horse. At the nearby museum we saw many other sculptures depicting Indians in a variety of styles. And that was when the idea of making a Native American warrior came into being (**Fig.03 – 07**).



Fig.03

Concept

Expanding on this idea, I wondered: Now, what if this warrior is made out of rocks, or partly made out of rocks? Or what if he has control over stone elements? Like a shaman with mystical powers, who has either trained for years to master this skill or has inherited it from his ancestors. Or maybe, to survive the occupancy of his land, he has learned to camouflage himself like a chameleon. And as a result, he is the sole survivor of his tribe, the last of his heritage. Or maybe he was born that way, with some sort of mutant power? These kinds of "what if" questions are what you should ask yourself to get into the mindset of thinking

Refining your Concept

Once you have something promising, then it's time to stick to it and spend some time refining it. And I don't mean add detail to a sketch; I mean play with the same idea but looking at it from slight different angles. Another thing that refining an image will do is to up the wow factor. Sometimes an early sketch nails an idea, but often you can come up with more dynamic/ cooler ways of conveying that same idea (**Fig.26 – 32**).

I'm not going to show a finished design for my Native American character. This is not what this tutorial is about. Being able to render is not as important as being able to convey your ideas with clarity. Even though these were not meant for showing, when you look at these sketches, it is clear what was going on in my head. And sometimes that's as far as a concept needs to go in order to communicate to others!

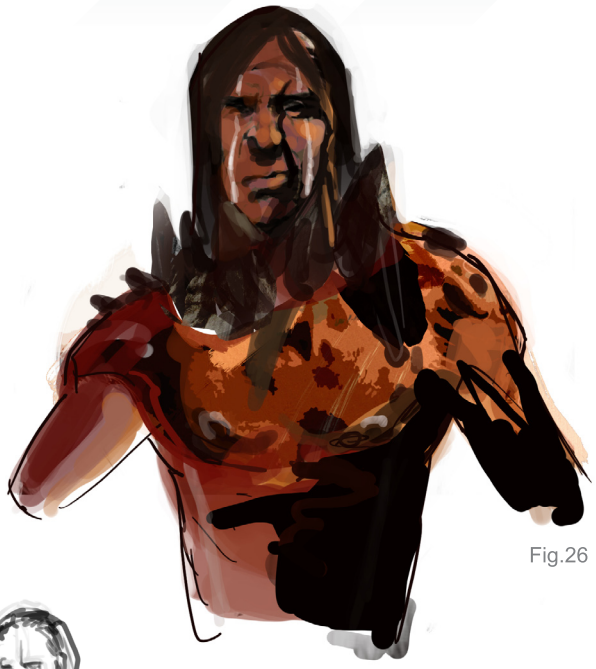


Fig.26



Fig.27



Fig.28



Fig.29



Fig.30

I have documented a series of thoughts/triggers/ questions that went through my head, put in order, as follows:

- National parks – harsh conditions – warrior's habitat – warrior is Native American
- Rocky Mountains – rock shapes resemble human faces – warrior is partly made out of rocks – warrior camouflages among rocks – rocks are ornamental – rocks are like parasites; they grow on him – warrior controls rock element
- Warrior is young – warrior is too young – warrior is old and wise – warrior is last of his kind – warrior doesn't talk, ever
- What does his full body look like? – He should have some clothes on – he's got a bare chest – he should look more natural – warrior is butt naked – warrior has face (war) paint (scarier!) – warrior has war paint all over his body – play with war paint pattern design

And so on.



Fig.31

Final Thoughts

Although I have just showed you in this article how I went about visually brainstorming a warrior, keep in mind that this is just one way of doing it. This process is very unique to each artist and varies based on the assignment. In any case, it's a very powerful tool to help you think creatively, to come up with unique ideas and think out of the box. I suggest devoting more time to it, if you haven't already. Don't worry too much about the quality of the images you're producing. Rather, witness how your brain responds to visuals, see where your imagination takes you, and enjoy the ride!

Bruno Werneck

For more from this artist visit
http://www.brunowerneck.com
or contact
contact@brunowerneck.com



Fig.32

CHAPTER THREE

Speed Painting & Concept Design By Björn Hurri



Chapter 3: Speed Painting & Concept Design

Software Used: Photoshop

Introduction

In this third part of the tutorial series we will take on board what we have learned in the previous chapters of this series, by Darren Yeow (Part 1) and Bruno Werneck (Part 2), and we will now create a model sheet based on our character design.

We will assume that the potential modeler for our character concept is an experienced one, is capable of working from a modeling sheet, and that he/she has a good understanding of form. And from this assumption, we will paint the character from an angle so that all shapes have better definition, and we therefore avoid the “stiffness” often inherent with a standard view representation.



Fig.01 Fig.02

Anatomy

I tend to incorporate the anatomy base early on into my design phase so that whilst I am sketching my way to the final design, I already have the anatomy of the character underneath. That way, each new part or design follows the same base so that there is no confusion or odd exaggerations in form.

With the anatomy base (**Fig.01**) ready to be painted upon, I start to lay down brushstroke after brushstroke onto a new layer, whilst not being too bothered by exact lines at this stage because I tend to mold and carve my forms as I go along.

Front View

I try to keep the armor that I paint in line with the anatomy underneath so that I know it is functional, and that all parts are where they should be, to ease the future modeling and rigging work that our colleagues will do (**Fig.02**).

I continue to define parts by laying down basic brushstrokes with a light source in mind to better define the form. It is important not to zoom in too much here as it is easy to get caught up in details at a stage when they don’t really matter. Try to keep yourself from doing so with the mantra, “It will all make sense in the end.”

The skin and armor are too close to one another value wise, so I create a new layer on top using the Overlay layer blending mode. I paint with white over where I want the skin to be lighter. This helps the character to read better, and now the skin and metal stand apart (**Fig.03**).



Fig.03

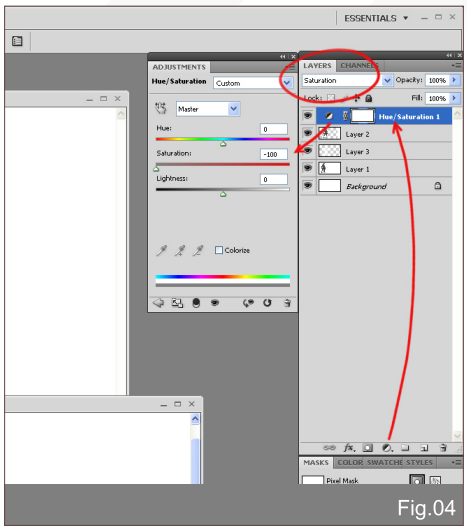
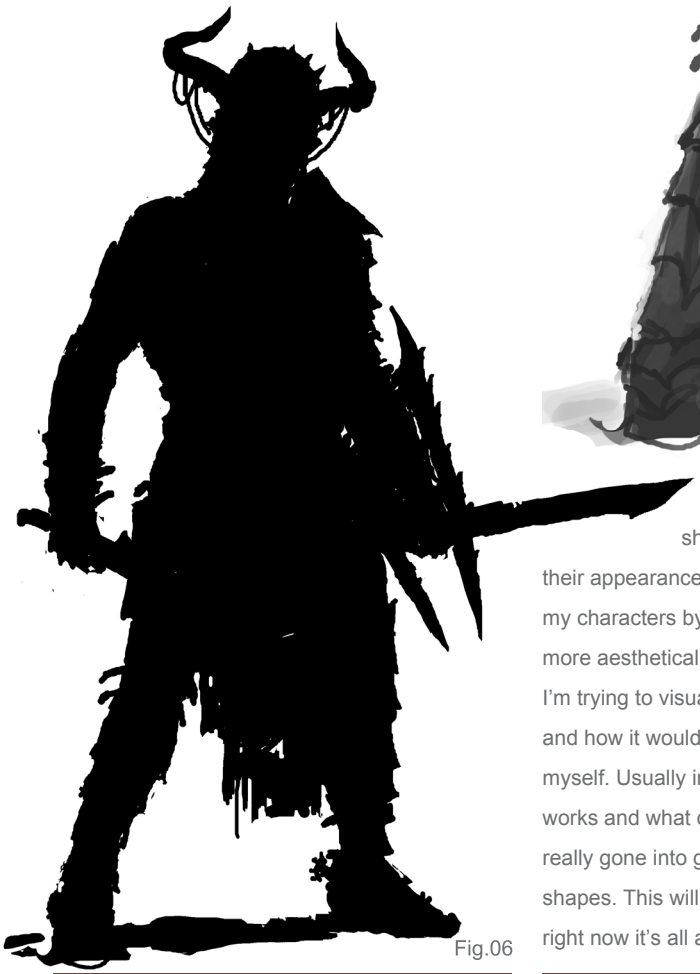


Fig.04

That layer blending mode has a tendency to change the hue of what is underneath it, so by creating a Hue/Saturation Adjustment Layer on top of your painting, which is set to Saturation: -100, it will help your values stay gray rather than becoming blue, for example (**Fig.04**).

I continue to add to the details and pieces of armor of the design, thinking about the character and that what he/she does plays a great part in their appearance. Personally, I tend to create my characters by function rather than taking a more aesthetical approach. And in this case, I'm trying to visualize the armor on my body and how it would move if I were to be wearing it myself. Usually in this way I can figure out what works and what doesn't (**Fig.05**). I still haven't really gone into great detail of the line quality or shapes. This will be addressed at a later point; right now it's all about getting the necessary information down – the spit and polish comes later. So let's move onto our rear view, now.


Fig.05


Fig.06

Rear View

If you think of your character as a form, the front could easily also be the back (**Fig.06**). So I copy the character over to the right, and that will become our rear view. Due to the fact that the character has been painted at an angle makes this phase is a little bit trickier than if it were drawn in a standard view, but it's not a big problem.

Imagine a line going across the forms you have painted – the centerline – and this will help with your understanding of how to create the back view a lot easier (**Fig.07**).

I usually create the centerline in my mind, but because this is a tutorial I will illustrate the thought process for you (**Fig.08**). By using the centerline while flipping anything in perspective, it shouldn't be hard to paint as long, as the flip is a 180 degree rotation.

I have now reached the point of the back of the design where the armor is starting to become quite defined (**Fig.09**). I want to make sure it is interesting from all angles so I will start to paint the side view now.



Fig.07

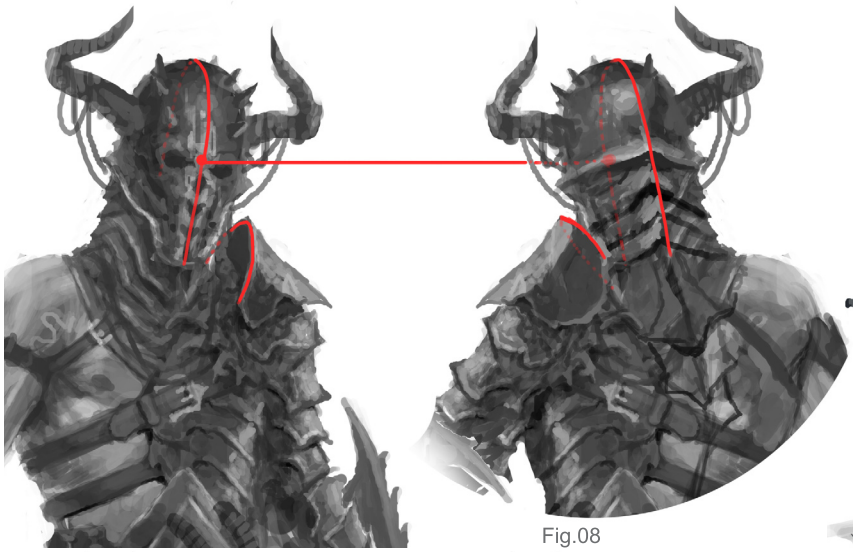


Fig.08



Fig.09

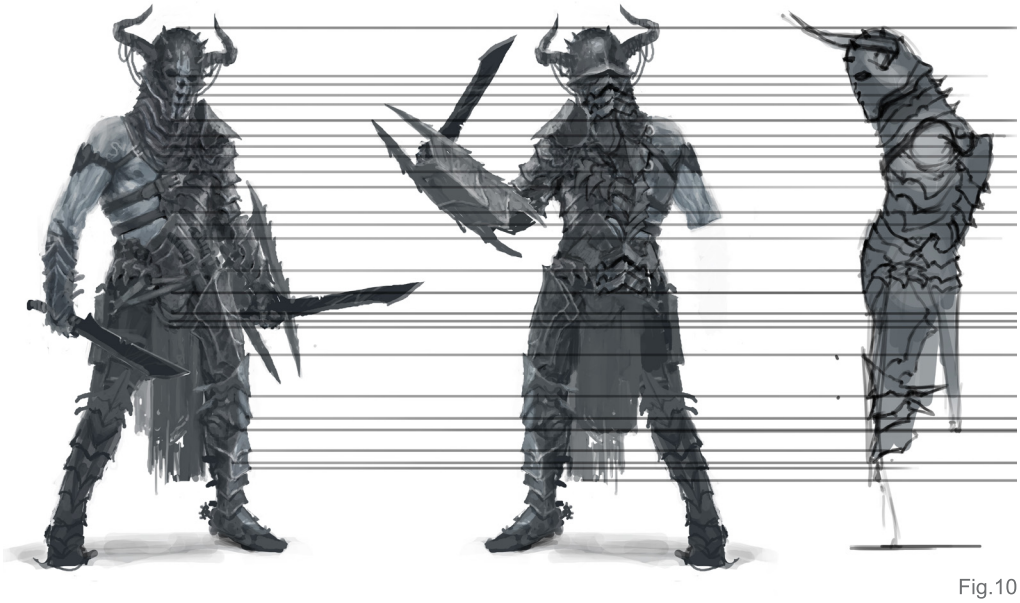


Fig.10

Side View

I create a new layer at the top of the image and lay down some straight lines from the essential points, to use them as my "anchor points". Areas that define a form should get a line. Taking the helmet as an example, there will be a line at the top of the helmet, and a line where it will end at the bottom (**Fig.10**).

You can move parts around now in order to make it look its best. At this stage I tend to do a lot of adjustments and alignments. If I'd previously spent a lot of time defining too many details I would have had to redo them now whilst



Fig.11

making these changes, which wouldn't be a very efficient workflow (**Fig.11**).

Adding Definition

I am now at a point where I am satisfied with the adjustments made, and so I will now start to define the shapes in order to make it as clear as I can for our modeler to follow (**Fig.12**).

By creating temporary selections and painting within them helps me to keep the edges as clear as possible, without having to go over them lots of times to make them all nice and crisp. If you look at **Fig.13** I have painted a small example of the technique for you. Here I have a fuzzy line between two shapes that I want to make clearer. I make the selection and paint inside it. By inverting the selection back and forth I



Fig.12

can continue to detail and paint without being bothered about the edges and keeping them clean. This is just a quick example, but it should help illustrate the method for you to experiment with.

By applying the same technique, the details and edges become defined enough for the character design to be suitable to be modeled from (**Fig.14**).

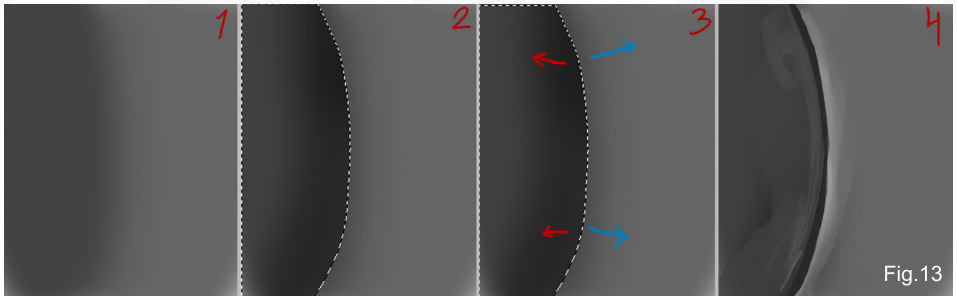


Fig.13

Color

As a final touch, and to add some color to the design, I create a new layer on top of all layers which I set to the Color layer blending mode. I paint in blocks of color to separate the parts of the design even further, making it easier for our modeler to follow and translate into 3D (**Fig.15**).

And we're done!

Björn Hurri

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Fig.14

Chapter 4: Dynamic And Exaggerated Poses

Introduction

To create a dynamic and exaggerated pose is to push the limits of human (or animal) physics. This becomes much easier if one has an understanding of the anatomical make-up of the human body. Many artists have spent lifetimes figuring out the mechanics and how the “human machine” performs under various stresses. It can take a lifetime to perfect the mechanics of the body’s movements and gain the understanding of how all the pieces fit together to form the perfect puzzle. For the sake of using this information to help you perform in the animation and entertainment industry, simplifying is just as important as understanding the complexities of the human (or animal) form.



Fig.01



Fig.02

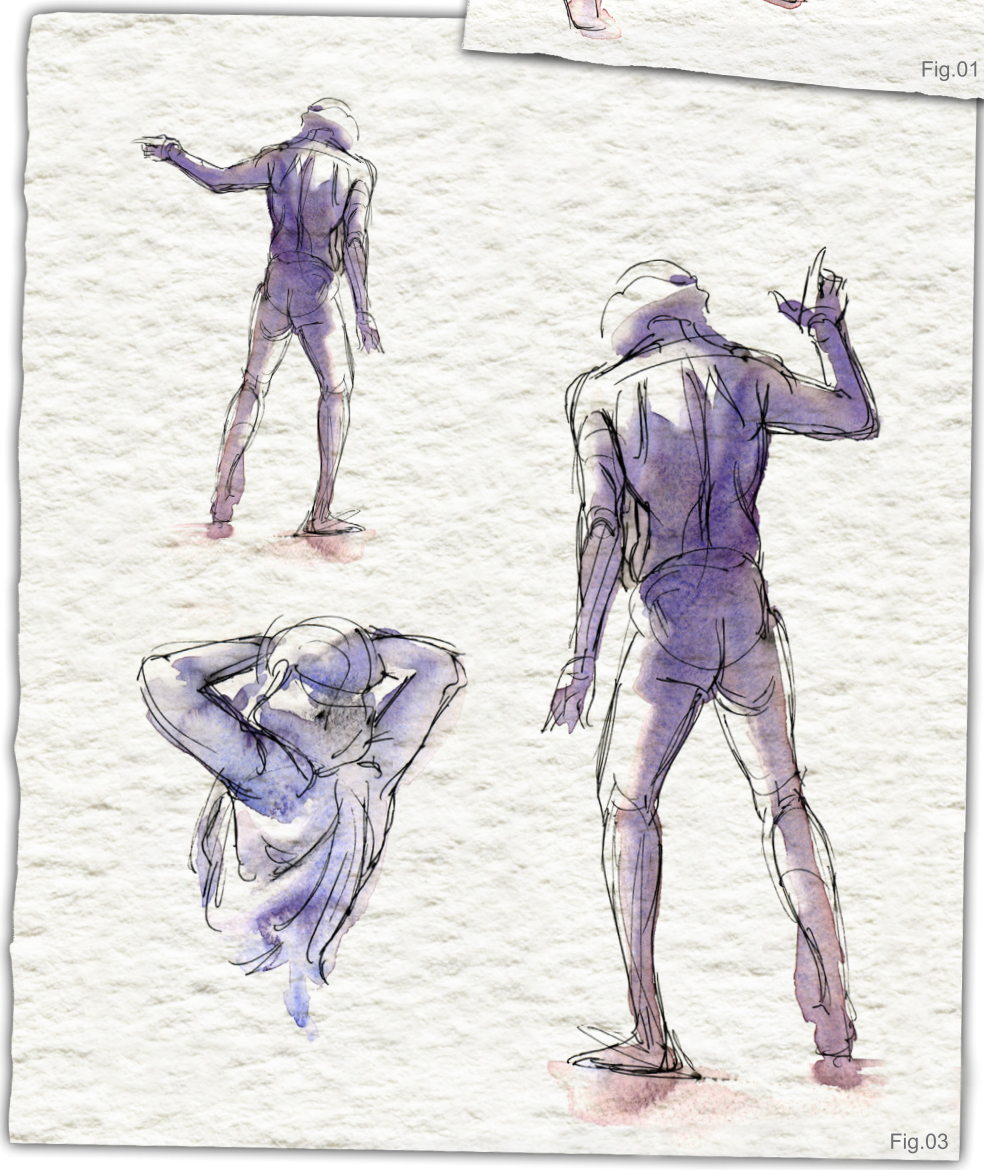


Fig.03

In figure drawing, this is an incredible practice that must remain in one’s studies until we have all grown the long white beard worn by those giants that have come before us (ladies, please excuse the beard reference). Giants such as Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Raphael, Parmigianino and countless others, all spent a lifetime accumulating the knowledge of the human body to plaster images on high ceilings, religious institutions and various cultural meeting spots.

These images are various studies I have drawn recently (**Fig.01 – 03**). In the following images, however, you’ll see more of a purpose than in these initial ones.

That purpose is simply: the story.

Story

The story should always be in your head when you are after anything that deals with gesture drawing for any medium or platform you are designing for. Imagining what the person,

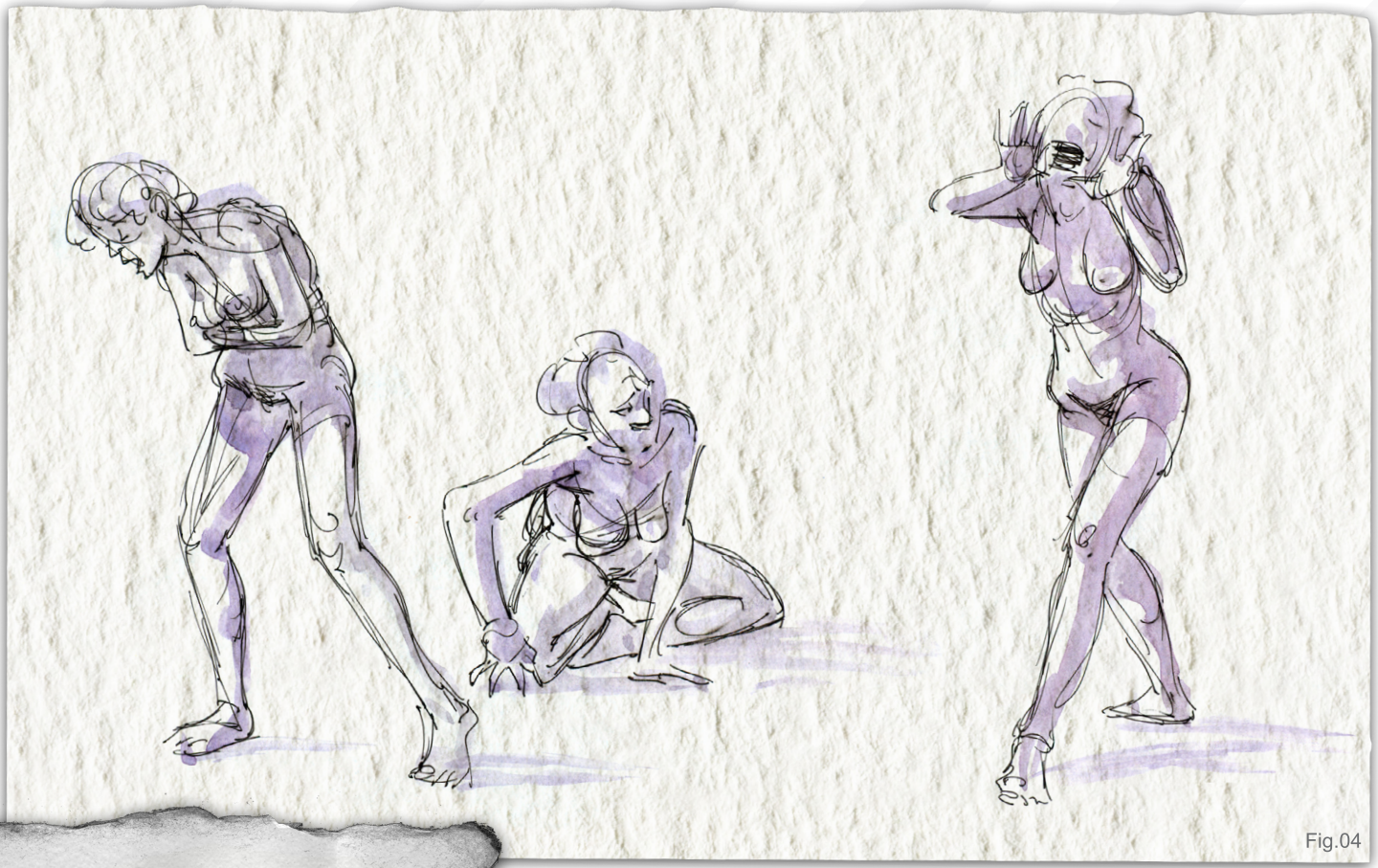


Fig.04



Fig.05

character or beast is thinking will make your work transcend the typical study we happen upon on various portfolios, blogs or websites as we scour the Internet for sources of inspiration.

As you can see in these quick sketches (**Fig.04**), there is a thought behind the sketches, not just an application of how light falls upon the form. Perhaps thinking in terms of feeling ill, worriedly on the lookout, or yelling something specific will determine a better understanding of not just the pose but the story of what's happening for this particular pose. This type of thinking is the first step in creating a dynamic and story-driven "interpretation" of how to approach sketches that will lead to final rendered pieces. Without this first step you may have a beautiful, well-rendered piece full of incredible and dramatic lighting that suggests the ultimate battlefield, strewn with the bodies of warriors placed under the foot of the victor, yet it may appear dead or somewhat soulless. This is generally due to a lack of dynamic and exaggerated posing.

Standing Poses

Let's start with an example of a person standing at the bus stop waiting for the bus to come and pick them up to carry them to their destination. Pulling out the trusty sketchbook and observing life is just as important as sharpening a needle-sharp pencil to do figure drawing or holding a stylus ready to begin an illustration!

Please note: I am an artist who primarily works in the animation industry and my personal preference is in finding character and pushing the pose to support the action and personality that a particular individual would exhibit.

In the first example, perhaps an elderly man is waiting by the bus stop, happily content to get to his next destination. As a character designer and visual development artist, one is always

concerned not only about the personality, but the overall shape a person has, and how that shape will read from a great distance. This is something to always consider when sketching. There will be hits and misses, but always think about the overall silhouette and if and how that pose reads to *clearly* describe who that person is, or what their specific action is. The clearer the better! This is why exaggerating the pose is so important and necessary in the animation and entertainment industry.

Sometimes – as with this example of the elderly man (**Fig.05**) – subtleties are more important than a bold action. Knowing when to use what is just as important as the actual drawing itself. In the elderly man you can see he is slightly off kilter and not as sure footed as some of the other characters waiting at the bus stop in this next illustration (**Fig.06**). Generally speaking, the wider the feet are from the center of the body, the sturdier the posture will be due to a greater balance of weight from the center point of the body.

In pose B, we can see the character is leaning in to see around the corner for the bus that she is so eagerly waiting for. She also is holding her hands behind her back, showing even more of an uncomfortable wait that may cause her to be late for an important function.

In pose C we can see the woman is slightly more aggressive just from her stance. Her posture suggests more of someone "on guard" – her legs are more apart, increasing her center of gravity, giving her a stronger stance.

In pose D we can see this lady is slightly more withdrawn and kept to herself. We can see that by the way she's enclosed her hands and is crossing her arms. She's balanced in her stance but ready to move quickly, if need be.

In poses E and F we can see these two are a couple straight out of a Hollywood roadside. Their close proximity suggests they are together. It also shows by their general look. She's strongly stanched to look good, while he's more in command and ready for anything that comes his way in an effort to protect her, based upon his widened stance, similar to pose C.
In the following illustration examples, we'll be approaching more movement-based drawings.

Movement

By taking the same knowledge from the sketchbook drawings and applying it to life drawings, the sketches will appear much clearer and grasp more of the "spark of life" others are so drawn to, such as the examples (**Fig.07**). Certain situations call for more dynamic, "pushed" poses, while other poses demand a more subtle style of dynamics. For example, the sketchbook pages of the patrons waiting to be picked up from the bus stop show these subtleties. A more dramatic, or a subtle push, can both be accomplished by focusing on the overall silhouette. This will automatically exaggerate the pose and make it far more dynamic than merely copying what you are seeing in front of you. From here, adding the subtleties of what the character or person is thinking will generally push the drawing over the edge and into the "unique" category.

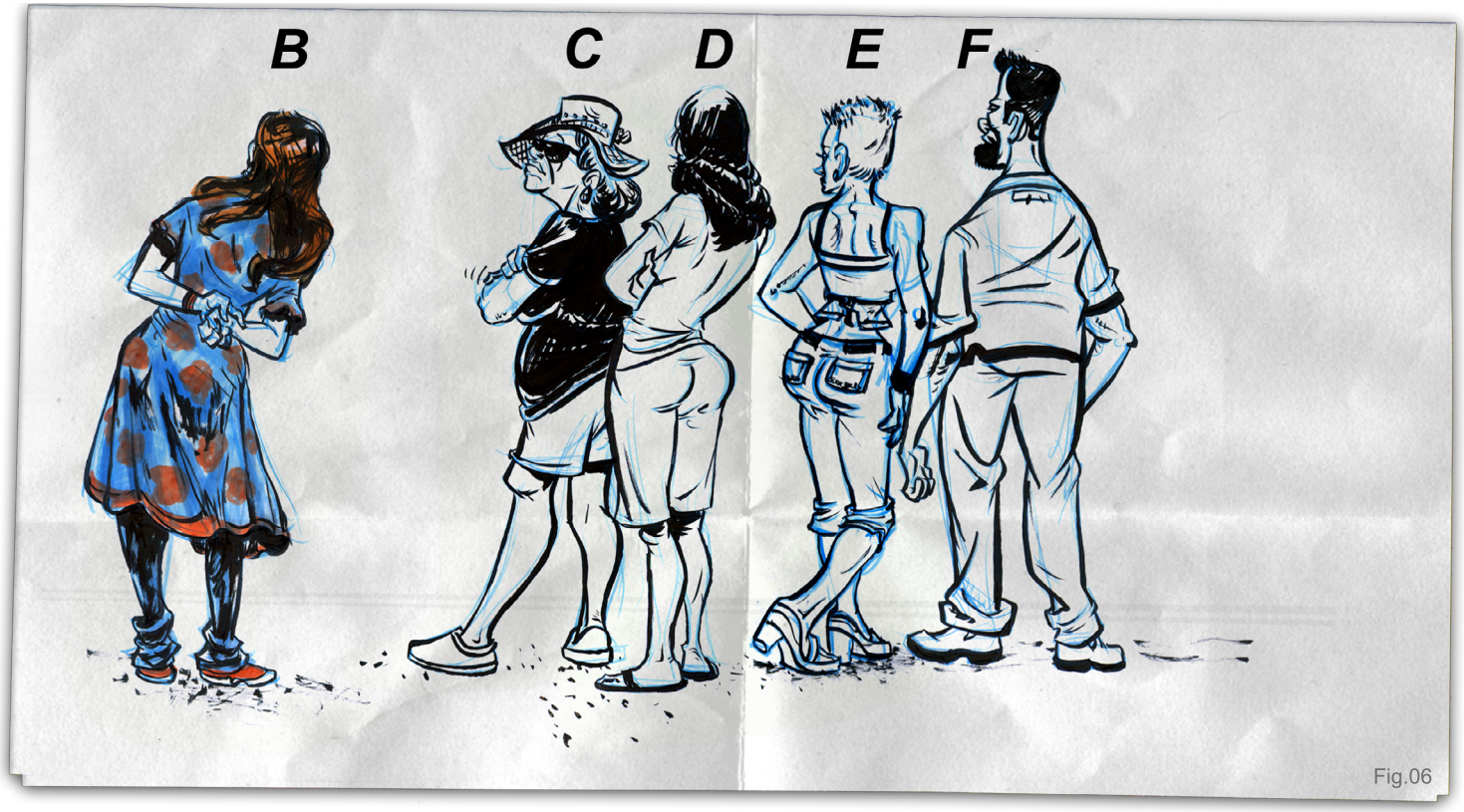


Fig.06













Fig.07



Fig.08

But always remember: be it figure drawing, character design, concept design, film design or anything in-between, the root of it all is capturing the correct amount of "life" that will be appropriate to the particular project that is being worked on. This is why figure drawing is such an amazing and unending source of inspiration. It's unending because you will be practicing whatever you are interested in experimenting with directly into the challenge of figure drawing itself.

One good rule to always follow is to leave the facial features or expressions last. It's my personal feeling that the entire body language without the face should communicate what the action is in the pose, or poses. It's really the icing on the cake and can be the greatest exclamation mark at the end of a statement. Take a look at some of the sketches here to see some gestural approaches to feeling out the pose, and more importantly, the character that is posing (**Fig.08**).

From the ballerina sketches to here, you can see that pushing the pose into a more dynamic and exaggerated way will increase the storytelling aspect of a drawing or concept, as well as give you that "spark of life" you are searching for in any piece of artwork. With that being said, this process of gesture drawing is cross-platform – from animation, illustration, film design, storyboarding, concept design, visual development, character design and everything in-between. It's the root of all things. It's the first step and the last adjustment to any amazing illustration and should not be overlooked in an effort to finish a piece for production purposes or otherwise (**Fig.09 – 10**).



Fig.09

Note from the Editor:

Mark McDonnell recently published the book entitled, The Art and Feel of Making It Real: Gesture Drawing for the Animation and Entertainment Industry. It is a comprehensive and complete guide to gesture drawing that explains how to design and capture the essence of life, giving anyone from hobbyist to industry professional the tools to fuel the power of their imagination for production purposes or otherwise.





Fig.10

Mark McDonnell

To purchase Mark McDonnell's book or view his artwork please go to:

http://www.cre8tivemarks.com (Store section)

http://markmcdonnell.blogspot.com/

or contact

cre8tivemark@aol.com

CHAPTER FIVE

Camera Placement, Framing, Fore-shortening & Distortion By David Smit





Fig.01

Chapter 5 Camera Placement, Framing, Fore-shortening & Distortion

A perfect character design – a brilliant idea, just brilliant! If people could see this you would be the God of all forums, an instant 5-star wonder!

You've worked for weeks on your character; every detail fits perfectly and you know exactly what kind of environment to put your character in. All that remains is to make the final shot, after days (and days) of hard labor, getting everything exactly right. You – you hero, you! – have just created a masterpiece! You upload it to the forums … Here you go: you're on the fast track to fame now. You refresh your browser … and again. No replies yet. Ah, but it's only been there for a few seconds, everybody is probably still sleeping – it is 5am, after all. You go to bed, and wake up in the morning all excited because you just know you've hit the jackpot. You turn on your computer, go straight to the forums to check your thread, and there you have it: a grand total of absolutely no replies at all. It stays quiet all day, and the next day. You start getting nervous. Five days later someone replies, "Hey, nice work. Took me a few minutes to figure out what you meant but cool idea." That's it, that's all you get for your hard, intense work! Can nobody see the brilliance? What went wrong…?

We've all been there, I guess (or at least I've been there plenty of times). You messed up the final composition: you didn't place the camera right and it suggests the wrong thing for the wrong character. Instead of people being impressed by your dark, über giant with a glowing sword, they actually think it's a cute little character with tiny dots on the ground scattered all around him. So what did go wrong?

This is something I'll try to shine a little light on in this tutorial about camera placement, framing and other things to keep in mind to convey the right things for your image.

Introduction

When I was first asked to write this tutorial I immediately agreed. What a great opportunity to write something about a part of image creation that I really like, and also a good exercise for me to structure the knowledge I have about this topic? So I sent the email back, saying I agreed with it and I would be more than happy to write something. Not too long after I wrote that email though, I thought and realized what it

actually meant: writing about camera positioning and framing. In a way, you can just talk about overlay tricks, positioning and what it does to the subject, but the basics – or the fundamentals – of those theories and tricks are basic rules of composition.

Now, composition is a slightly different story. People study composition for years, and most artists never really completely figure composition out perfectly. It's a fascinating topic as well as a frustrating one. It's an important topic, but a difficult one. And most of all, it's a humongous, ridiculously over-the-top big topic! I've only just started to explore the world of composition and definitely haven't figured it out yet. So this tutorial has become a bit of both, I guess. I focus on a quite specific element of composition and try to give lots of examples and tricks on improving dynamic framing, but there is no escaping composition theory. So I've also included some of that in here, too. Of course it's short, cut down to fit into the story and it's not by far a complete view on composition or dynamic framing and camera position, but hopefully it will become a small guide for you into the wondrous world of it all!

Composition

So let's kick off with a little bit about the fundamental background of the whole thing: Composition. When you say "composition", most people will think about the placement of dark and light elements on a canvas or the Golden Rule of Thirds, etc., which of course is true. But there is much more to composition than that! Composition is basically how you arrange your scene for the viewer. This can be purely down to aesthetics, or to tell a story; it can be 2D or 3D; it can be the design of an outfit or a landscape – anything and everything is or can been seen as composition (yep, it's that big).

The thing with composition is that you can learn everything there is to know about it from text books, completely understand it, and still not be able to do it. It takes years of experience to even get the basics; to truly understand them and be able to apply them. I have to cut the whole thing down a bit in order for me to finish this tutorial before I'm 80, so for the sake of this article and to keep it to an acceptable size, I'm going to focus on story driven composition with a special focus on camera placement and framing for dynamic characters. That being said though, I would advise everyone to read up on composition separately to this tutorial (I actually should start re-reading a lot of things myself as I'm sure I've forgotten some of it already).

Official composition rules are a great way to learn how to place things, but most of all they are great analytical tools to help you see what you've done wrong – or right. But I do feel that these formal composition rules, in my opinion, should be considered as guidelines and not laws, for it is always about what you want to tell or show, and any or every rule should be bent or broken for that purpose.

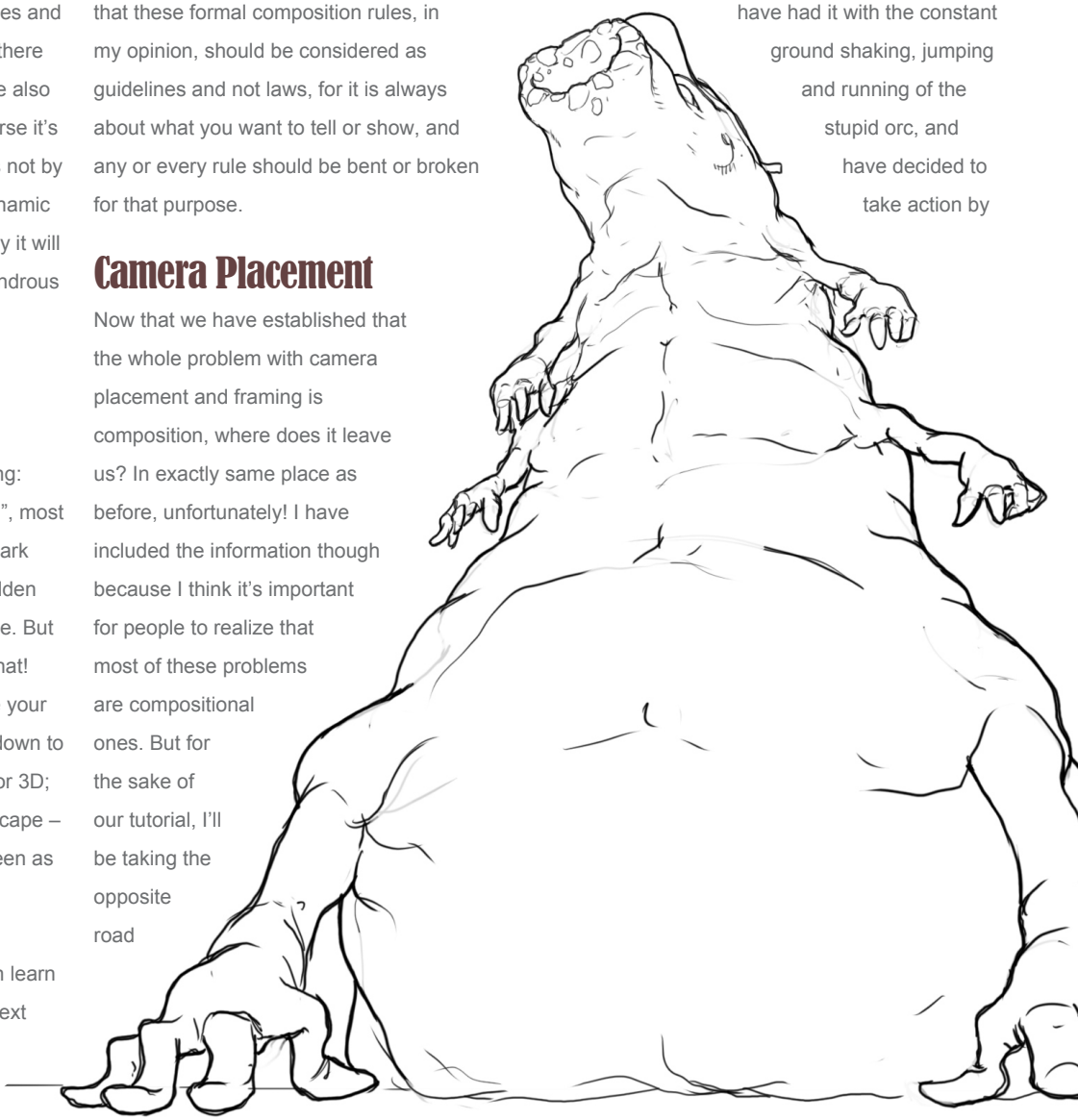
Camera Placement

Now that we have established that the whole problem with camera placement and framing is composition, where does it leave us? In exactly same place as before, unfortunately! I have included the information though because I think it's important for people to realize that most of these problems are compositional ones. But for the sake of our tutorial, I'll be taking the opposite road to the solution: not from *how* you want to tell it, but from what you want to tell. First and foremost, you need to know what you *want* to tell. This is the most important thing in a story driven image, and a necessity in order to choose a correct camera angle and a frame.

Story

What do you want to tell?

What is the main element of your story? The scared face of your beautiful night elf just seconds before it gets smashed in by the ridiculously big hammer of an orc? Maybe the extreme size of the orc compared to your cute little night elf? Is it the tiny pink rabbits that are trying to flee the site of danger before they get elf blood on their pretty fur? Or maybe it's the army of frustrated worms who have had it with the constant ground shaking, jumping and running of the stupid orc, and have decided to take action by



mobilizing the entire worm family, arming themselves with advanced, high-tech nano weapons, and under the command of the most feared worm general in history they stride to battle to take down the orc? All this is one scene?!

The question is: what story do you *want* to tell? For any one of those above, I would pick a different camera angle. If you don't know exactly what you want to tell then go to a cafe, have a drink and try to figure it out. If you don't figure it out before you start then there is a small chance it will work out, but there's a much bigger chance you'll get a grand total of absolutely no replies on the pro art forums and you *won't* be on your fast track to internet fame!

Getting your story ready

Okay, so how exactly do you get your story ready? One way, as I said before, is to have a drink. Alcohol works for me (most of the time), but let's assume you're not a drinker and want to figure this out in a bit more of a structured and analytical way. So the first thing you should always do is choose your story. I can't really help you with that one; it's your choice if you want to display the elf being smashed by the hammer, or not. I would personally go for the worm family, of course – it's so ridiculous that it should be fun!

The next question is: what elements do you *have* to display in the scene? Which things are fundamental to the story? I'm always in favor of showing as little as possible without compromising the story. First of all, it leaves much more for the viewer to interpret for themselves. Or, to put it in other words, more people are bound to like it since everybody fills in their own details. Some will applaud you for your funny image and nice rendering skills, whilst the next person will go down on his knees because of your amazing intellectual depth in the image (of course, in reality you have no idea it could even contain "intellectual depth", but whatever, just play along!). Secondly, it usually makes the image a bit calmer, since there are fewer elements to distract the viewer. And last but certainly not least, it's less work. It can save you up to hours (or days), which you can then spend playing videogames or making your next internet famous image.



Fig.02

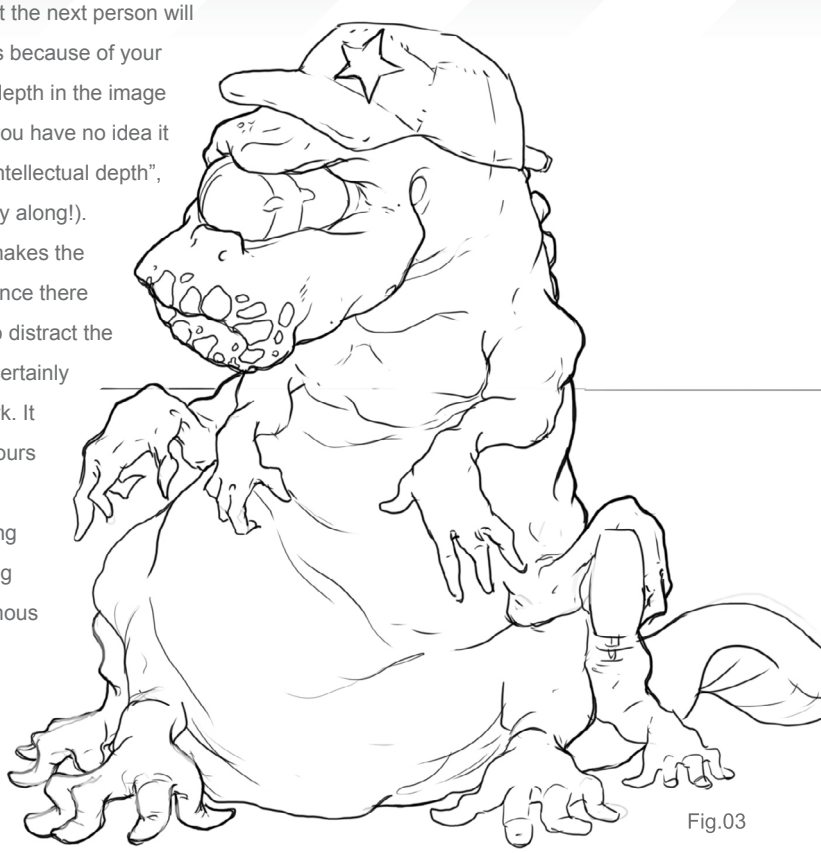


Fig.03

Something I've learned from game design is a little thing called the "MSCW list" (Moscow-list – easier to remember, which is basically: Must contain; Should contain; Could possibly contain; Would be nice to have. This is a way of creating a hierarchy of importance. Now I can tell you that Could never happens. Pretty much the same thing goes for Would. We can use a similar tactic to organize the information we have. So let's focus on Must and Should. Must in the image with the worms is of course the worms; in particular the worm general with the advanced, high-tech nano weapon. Secondly, since it's an army of worms, we need more worms – at least enough to suggest an army.

So here is our Worm General (**Fig.01**).

We're going to need the orc with a hammer as well. Preferably, we need to see the elf, but a suggestion of her could be enough.

Keep it simple!

Don't try to solve all the stories and problems in one image. You'll fail! Pick one thing that you want to tell, and leave the rest for a second, third of whatever image. If you put too much into one scene, the viewer will get lost and confused, and that's the last thing you want with this kind of image.

People in general look at a webpage for about seven seconds. Seven! And that's if it contains a lot of text, etc. If it's just an image, usually surrounded by other images, it's probably less. So let's say four seconds, which is not a lot of time to get a story across. You can't explain everything, so whatever you show must be obvious. No, is must be more than obvious! Make it so that even a mentally challenged monkey looking the other way could get it in four seconds, and you might have a slightly better chance of getting noticed.

Emphasizing your story

Okay, great. You've got your story down. You know exactly what needs to be shown and what can be left out. Now it's time to think about what elements you can add to increase the drama, movement, humor, or whatever you want to show in your image. This is a very important

step because it is basically where you try to move the camera around in your head to look for the perfect angle of the scene. There are some things to keep in mind though when you're staring into oblivion, trying to figure out where to put the camera:

Some Basics

Kick force perspective, low horizon: Increases the size of the character, adding a threatening effect; makes the user small and the subject big; great for your giant and dragon illustrations (**Fig.02**).

Eye level on main subject, horizon in the middle: Size of main interest is approx. the same size as the viewer (**Fig.03**).

Bird's eye view on main subject, horizon at the top: Subject of interest is smaller and/or lower than viewer; subject is dominated or the "underdog" (**Fig.04**).

These are the 3 most basic options. Of course, you can apply them in subtlety or exaggerate them however you want. You can use one of them, or combine them. It just comes down to the question: what works best for your purpose? There is always going to be much more that you can do and play with!

Additional Supporting Elements

Composition Disclaimer

Now the following section is a bit of a dilemma. I want to talk about supporting elements like foreground elements, the direction of lines, and the space around a subject to create certain sense of motion, but those elements will only work if your basic composition allows it. Yes, here we are again: composition. But to fully dive into the realm of composition is quite a task, and as mentioned before it would probably require 10,100 magazine pages filled with information written by – not me. I am far from a formal composition master or teacher. So what to do?

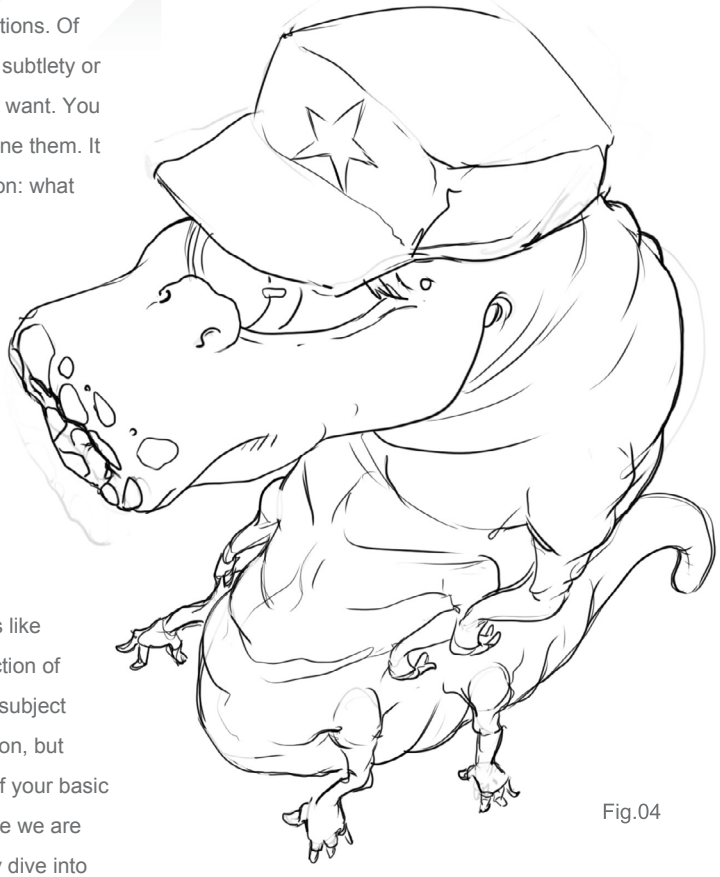


Fig.04



Fig.05

I'm going to slap composition in the face by stuffing it into a few basic boxes for this tutorial's sake. Now, don't kill me over this, I also have to go outside sometimes and get some fresh air, as well as eat. Talking too much about this subject will strip me of any form of what (very, very, very little) social life I (pretend to) have.

Ok, so let's get back to it. In general there are two types of composition: Static and Dynamic.

Static Composition is where the overall balance of an image feels solid (I am sure there is a much better way of describing this in one sentence, I just can't think how), and there is no obvious sign of motion. It often uses horizontal and vertical lines in a central orientated layout, using a triangular, round or square composition (this is really putting it into a small box!).

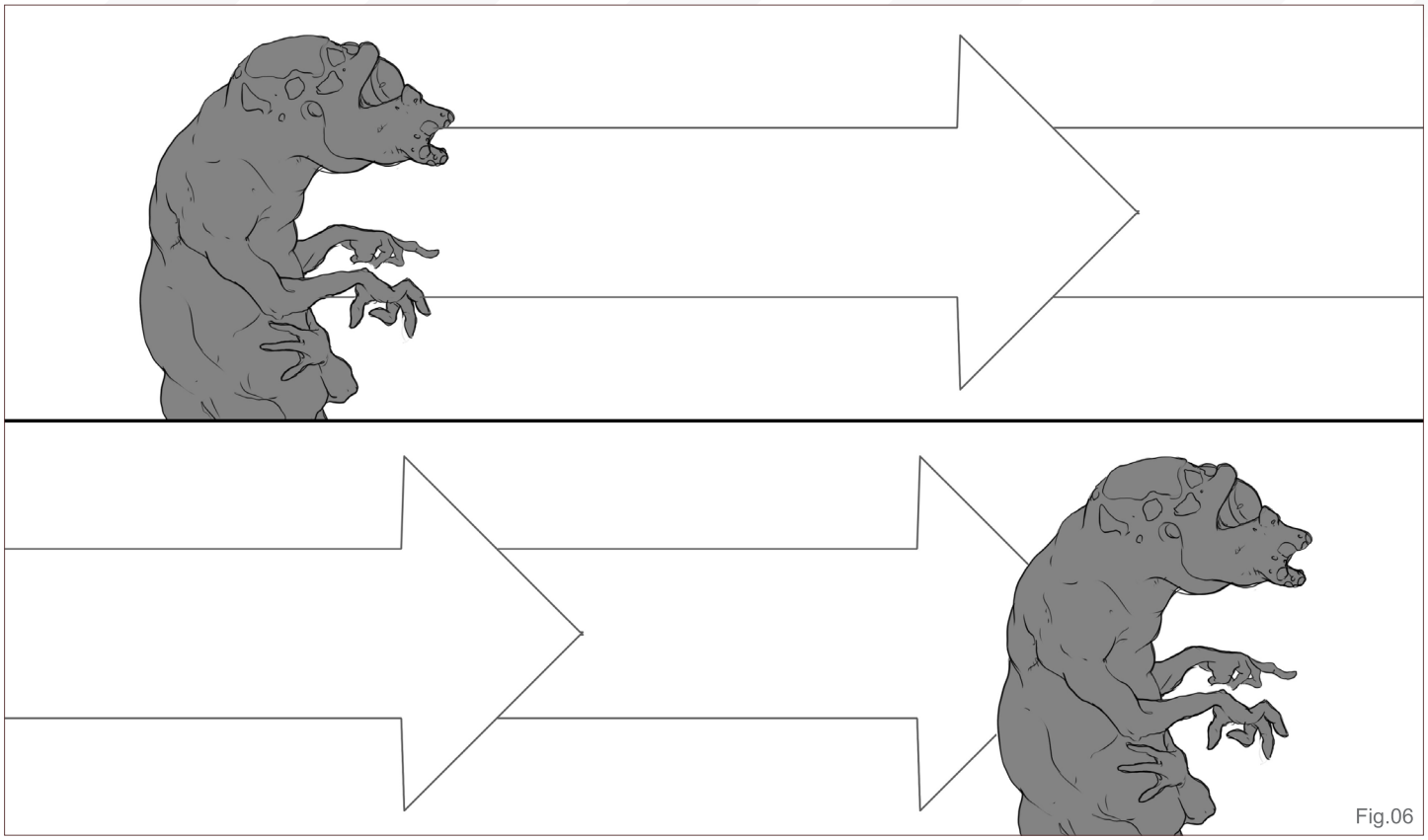


Fig.06

Dynamic Composition is where the image suggests movement, almost like a frame capture from a movie. It often uses curved and diagonal lines in an off-center layout, and often shows an element that suggests that it's going in a certain direction – your brain automatically finishes the movement. Now, if you want to know more about this, please don't email me. Read a book or take some lessons. If you want to complain about my composition blasphemy, you have all the right to, I guess.

Let's focus on Dynamic Composition

So you have your important elements clear. You know that you want to show it either big or small, depending on the purpose of your story. Now how do we get this baby moving?

Well first of all: don't put your focus point in the center; don't put it in the horizontal center; and don't put it in the vertical center (**Fig.05**). No center!

Disclaimer: there is no absolute rule in a lot of compositional rules. And, of course, you *could* put it in the center and still make it look dynamic, but you have to know exactly what you're doing (and I'm betting that the chance is really high that you're not reading this tutorial if you do.

Good, so you put it out of the center. Why does this work? Well it breaks the perfect balance of the whole composition, but also it suggests movement. To put it simply: balance = static; off balance = dynamic. If there is room in front of the character, for example, it suggests an area where the person can move to. If you show a large area behind the character it suggests the character is coming from that direction (putting a big empty space behind a character can also – depending on your context of course – suggest an element of danger) (**Fig.06**).

Secondly, you want to have more than one focus point: let the eye of the viewer wander around the image; let the viewer explore the image; allow eyes to follow lines and areas of contrast – the more the eyes move the more dynamic the image seems. Don't make 100 focus points – that won't work! That will just frustrate you *and* your viewer. Keep it simple. Just trust me for now.

Lines

Diagonal lines work great for a dynamic composition! Why? Because your eye automatically follows lines, and lines have a direction (a line does not have to be an actual drawn line, it can also be a suggested line by light, dark, colored or other elements (**Fig.07**).

A quick note on lines: I was always a big fan of flipping my image in Photoshop. It's great

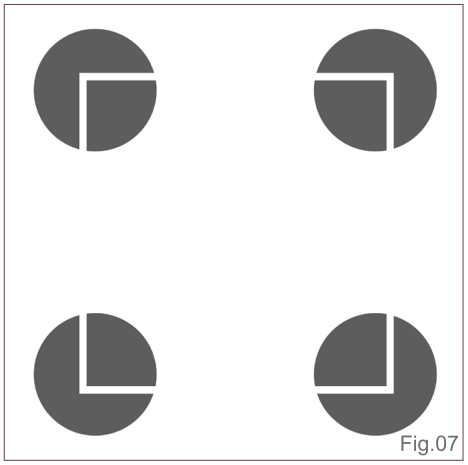
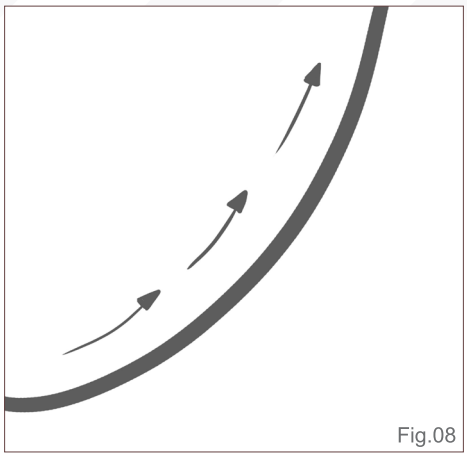
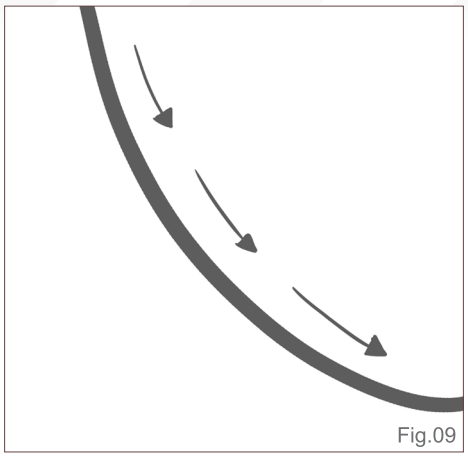


Fig.07

because it makes you look at your image from a new perspective. The old Masters used to hold their images or paintings upside-down in front of a mirror to check for mistakes. But lucky us, we have an option called “Flip”! I’ve always wanted to make sure an image works in either direction – flipped one way or the other. Later, when I was researching some things about visual storytelling, I came across some information that explained that a line curved upwards from left to right is perceived as going up (**Fig.08**). But if you flip it, it is perceived as going down (**Fig.09**).


Fig.08


Fig.09

So an image doesn’t have to work both ways, because you read the image completely differently either way. It’s got something to do with the reading direction. We are used to reading from left to right, which is why we also “read” an image from left to right. This has even more implications than just a line going up and down: things on the right side of the vision have a tendency to be perceived as more threatening (in general); things coming from the right side – let’s say a train, for example – are also perceived as going faster than when the train with the same speed is coming from the left side. These are small, unconscious things, and all really dependent upon context and so on. But they are fun to play around with!


Fig.10


Fig.11

Depth Placement

There is the option of putting the subject anywhere in the distance. So why should you choose one or the other? Well, the safest way is to put your main element in the middle ground, add some foreground and background elements, and you’re done. But this is boring and far too easy!

Putting your character in the middle of anything destroys the potential movement it can have towards any direction. It makes it balanced. Putting your character in the foreground suggests importance of the background, and an involvement of the background with your character.

For example, an empty, dried-out plane or desert stretching towards the horizon is much more threatening if your character is in the foreground element (**Fig.10**). This way the plane becomes much bigger, and it suggests that your character has to cross it or at least has some business with the unpleasantly big and empty space.

If you place your character half way along the plane, it also suggests isolation, but the plane becomes much less impressively big (**Fig.11**).

By putting your character in the background of the same plane suggests even more solitude,



Fig.12

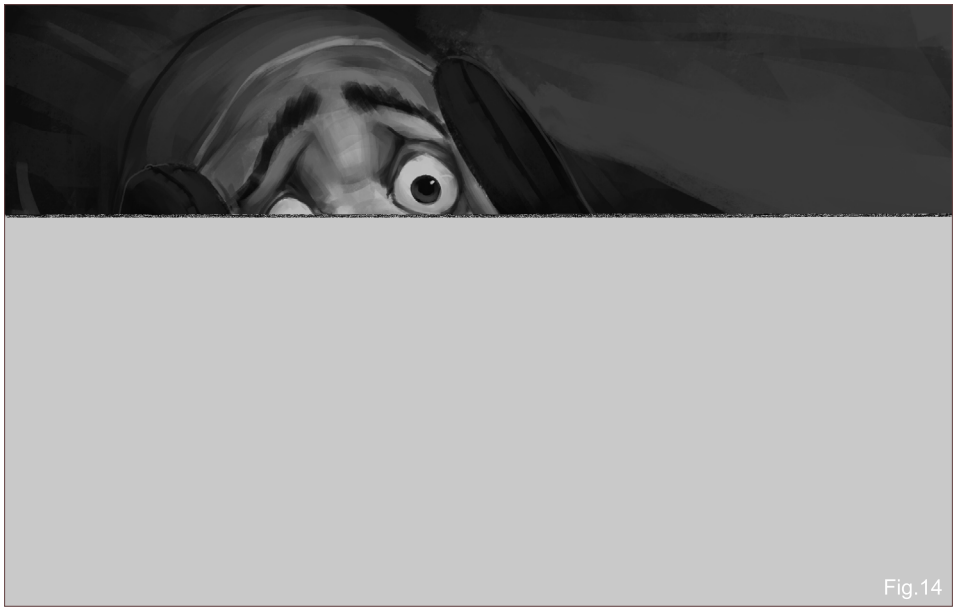


Fig.14



Fig.13

and hints at a traveled distance (**Fig.12**).
So to sum up, placement in depth can be considered in the same way as placement on the horizontal or vertical axes.

Camera Rotation

The simplest way of creating a dynamic composition is to rotate the camera. All naturally static horizontal and vertical lines – the horizon, trees, etc. – become diagonals, and it suggests that the camera or viewer is participating in the scene in a more active way (**Fig.13**).

Overlay Elements

Suggestion works great for dynamic scenes! Showing a little will make the viewer finish the rest in his or her brain. If you have a character that looks scared at the camera, it works, and it makes people guess a bit about what is happening (**Fig.14**).

If you show exactly why he or she is sacred, it still works a bit, but it's less exciting (**Fig.15**).

Fixed Frame

Framing offers lots of possibilities – that's if you have the freedom to pick a frame anyway. Often in the commercial world there are certain limitations to the frame you can use. If, for example, you have to create a cover illustration for a book then you'll have to work within the limitations of the format. This can make things a lot harder. When you need to display a lot of information about a landscape, for example, and a very wide horizontal frame would be perfect but the book is standard vertical size … Well, this is where you want to have a good understanding of composition, but more importantly about the most important elements that you need to show in your image. It is in these kinds of illustrations that you often have to sacrifice important things; the trick is to sacrifice the least important one.

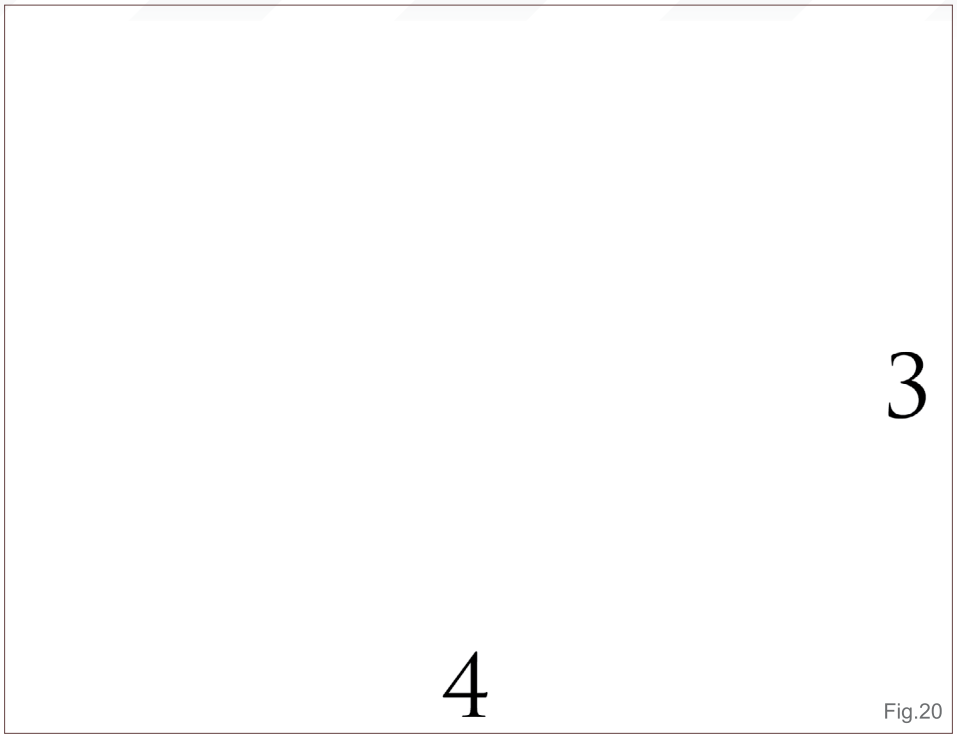


Fig.20

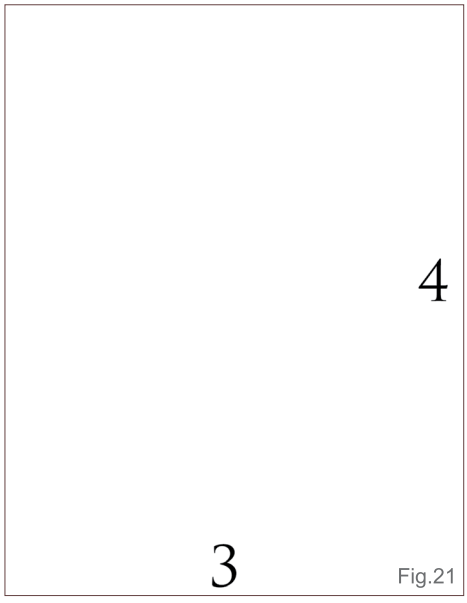


Fig.21

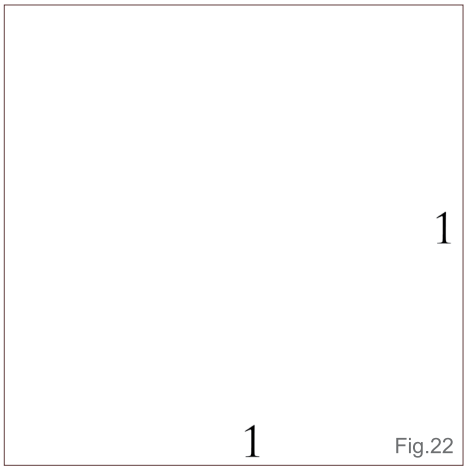


Fig.22

Sketching, thumbnailing and having a camera floating around in your head looking for the best possible angle are vital techniques to employ in these kinds of illustrations. However these kinds of frames are boring, or they're boring to talk about at least because they are set, fixed, and there is nothing you can do about it. You just have to find a way to make it work.

Free Frame

So I want to dive a bit further into the world of free frames; the place where you have endless possibilities – choice all over! The question is of course: Is more choice better? Choice is great if you can choose (now that makes sense, doesn't it?). Sometimes having no choice is great in the way that if forces you to think about a less than standard solution. It pushes you outside of your own little safe world where everything is great, beautiful and boring. It forces you to get frustrated and start thinking again.

I find that people often choose a frame because, well, just because it's always like that: landscape = wide; portrait = vertical. Of course it works; it always works. There is not necessarily something wrong with it, providing you know why you chose it.

So here we are: we have all the freedom in the world to choose a frame for our dynamic composition. What are the options? Well, infinite actually, but that would make this tutorial extremely long (or extremely short if I just keep it at the word, "infinite"). So let's break it down into a few forced boxes again (I like that: pushing things or people into boxes where they don't quite fit, but with enough force, or at the right angle, they will awkwardly look like they do sort of do).

Basic Frames

The non-special, what-you-see-all-day-long frames:

Horizontal: Your basic screen layout. Comfortable to look at, fits in the view of a person. It's a solid balanced shape. It's great for showing things that require some width, or for images that you plan for people to use as backgrounds. It's often a good choice for something that you want to feel like it has some sense of space, or if the space around an object is important. If you don't know what to choose, go for this one: easy, simple, straight forward (**Fig.20**).

Vertical: Again, quite a basic layout (but then I have put them in the basic category, so it does make sense). It has a familiar shape which is great for showing things that are a bit higher than they are wide, such as people. This shape also often shows a bit more depth, since a many elements tend to be overlapping or have foreshortening going on to make them fit in the frame (**Fig.21**). Now, I also find this shape a bit more dynamic. I'm not 100% sure why, but it might be because it's less grounded then a horizontal shape. Maybe it's because your eyes often can't fully see the whole image at once and they have to travel up and down, left to right? Or maybe I just like it? Not sure!

Squared: I really don't know what to say about this one (**Fig.22**). It's good for a CD cover, but that's about it in my opinion. I use it sometimes, but that's mainly because I crop the vertical or horizontal image because of a mess up somewhere and then it eventually ends up squared. Squared is boring; it's too solid, too rigid, too … well, it's just boring. Anyway, since this is not science I am not obligated by objective facts, I can be as subjective as I want to be. And I will be! I think squared sucks! It's just not fun! And there you have it. I don't think anyone will look me up after reading this and punch me in the face because he (or she – I prefer she) is a squared frame fundamentalist.

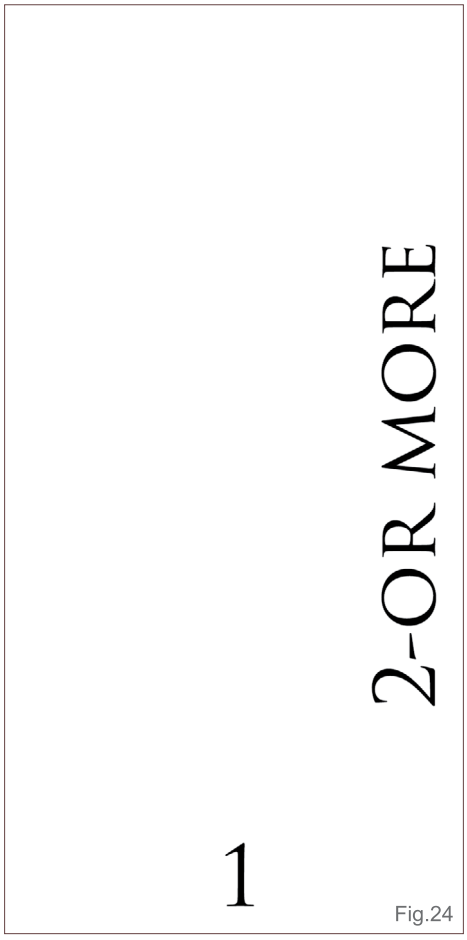


Fig.24



Fig.23

I just love to tell the whole world something sucks. It's just great! Somehow it's more rewarding than saying you like something. No, you really, truly think something sucks and the whole world can know about it – awesome! Of course, my opinion on things tends to change, so there is a good possibility that in the next year or so I may become an absolute squared frame fundamentalist!

Anyway, enough off-topic nonsense! We are here for information so let's move onto something a bit more interesting.

Extreme Frames

Extreme frames! This is basically the same as the basic frames, but exaggerated. Now there should be a note to the usage of extreme and unconventional frames: by using a choice of frame like this, you have got to have a reason. It will stand out if you don't, just because it is such an unconventional frame choice. That means that people expect it to make sense. You have to explain your choice of frame to the viewers. Now, if you choose an extreme widescreen frame for example, and you put a character in there (vertically), that means that the space around the character is given significant importance. The placement of your character in such a frame requires much more thought than in a regular frame. It can work out brilliantly – only if you place it right and there is a reason to place it there.

Extreme Widescreen: This one is awesome for über epic landscapes, or to show off exactly how long your hero's cape is (**Fig.23**).

Extreme Vertical: This is a great choice for things that are extremely long, or deep. It's a good choice if you want to have a wide angle camera lens and you want to show how big, or deep something is. It's also a good choice for a 3-point perspective (**Fig.24**).

Unconventional Frames

"Unconventional" is pretty much anything that hasn't fit into the previous headings. I rarely use them. Why? Well, because I don't often have a reason to use them. They also take a lot of pre-thought since all applications and paper are pretty much always bound to have four 90-degree angles, making them any variation of a square. So, if you want to do something different, you have to plan it, and you have to have a good idea why something like that would be a good idea. And I'm not too good at that – I tend not to plan.

But then, saying that I don't plan would completely discredit the previous text that I wrote before this. I do plan! I don't really like it, but sometimes you just have to. But, if I have a choice – as it is with free choice of frame – I choose not to plan too far ahead.

Still following me? Good. The thing is that there should be a reason for your choices. Are you in an online art competition and you want your space marine to stand out next to all the other squared space marine images? Well then, yes, go to the forum, press Print Screen, get the background color and "fake" the unconventional frame. Give your space marine his gun outside of the frame. Cool!

Ok, so a few conventional variations on unconventional frames. When people use unconventional things to be "original" they tend to choose the most common of uncommon things. Please don't use it for that; use it because it fits the image. If you want to be original like that then go out and paint a bicycle with pizzas. Otherwise, just make an original story and choose a frame that fits it.

Round: This is a bit like squared, don't you think? It's solid, but it's better than squared. I wouldn't use it though unless I have to. It's good for an avatar/portrait, I guess, but I'm not sure what else I would do with it. An epic landscape doesn't really work in this one (**Fig.25**).

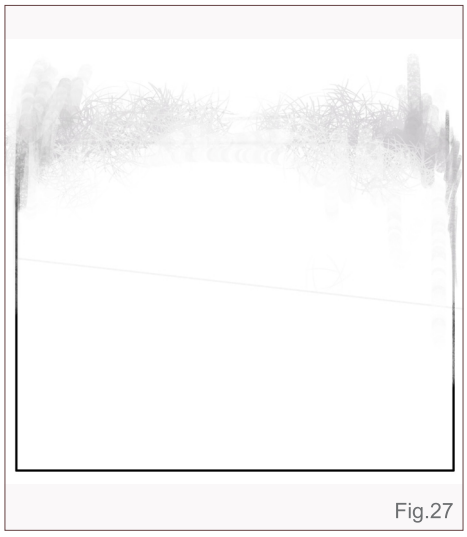


Fig.27

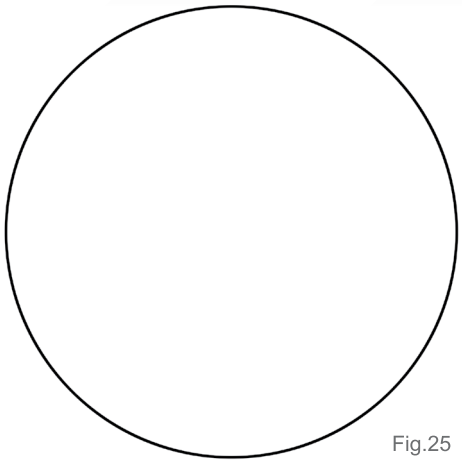


Fig.25

Outside the Box: This one is fun (if you can use it properly, that is)! It's a great way to attract attention to your image. It's very good for creating a sense of depth. Have your warlord step out of the image; it really works wonders if well applied. Be careful with it, though, because if you make a digital image, the image is always squared, so you actually have to select the background color in order to fake the effect. This makes it only good for that one specific forum. Of course, it's a bit easier if you make a comic, since you know the background and it's always the same (**Fig.26**).

Fuzzy Edge: This one is quite interesting, too, and it's great when combined with one of the above! Again, be careful because the image will only work with certain backgrounds (unless you make the background a specific color and you create a new frame in your big frame). It's hard to say what it is specifically good for since it depends so much on the image. It can also be nice to combine this with a normal sharp edge to create a surrealistic effect (**Fig.27**).

Creating the Final Image

So you've got your story ready and you've decided on your choice of frame. Now you just have to put it together and make an image. It's that simple!

The main trick here is to know what you want to make. Try out different setups; tryout a vertical frame or a horizontal one. Try adding an Overlay

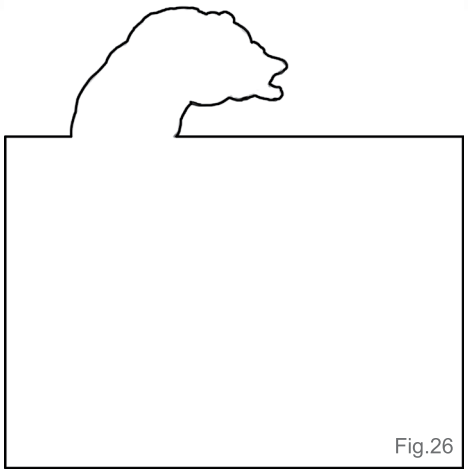


Fig.26

layer to the foreground, or perhaps even a big, empty space in the background. Try, try, try; sketch, sketch, sketch. Never go for the first one.

I could go into detail here on how to make an image exactly and setup your whole composition, but that would be ridiculous. Just try it out for yourself and use some of the elements described previously. I don't want to make a 1, 2, 3 step tutorial on how to create the "perfect" image. I don't want to hand out a sheet with tricks. Just use this as a guide to help you understand composition, camera placement, framing and the dynamics of an image better. Sorry for all those who were expecting a super trick to the solution of life, the universe, and everything under it, including eternal internet fame! It's not here; I'm not your man. If you want to know that, go and read the Hitchhikers guide to the Galaxy (the answer is 42, by the way). But I do hope you've enjoyed reading this as much as I have writing it …

Not that I was drunk while writing this (well, at least not the whole time anyway).

David Smit

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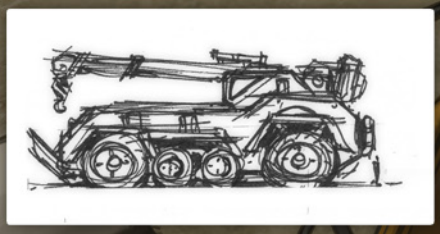
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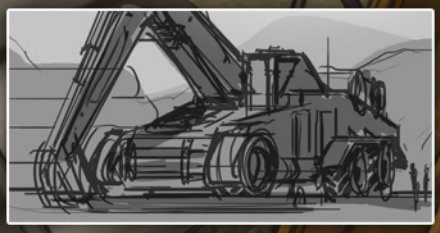


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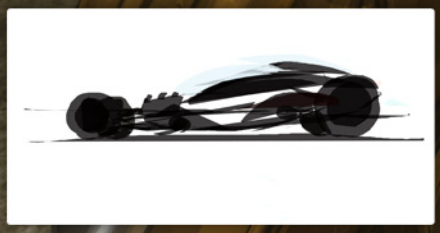
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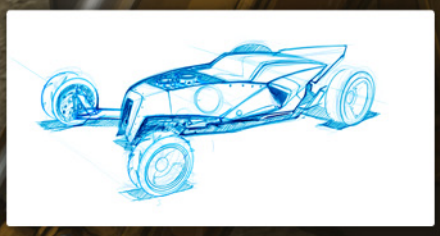
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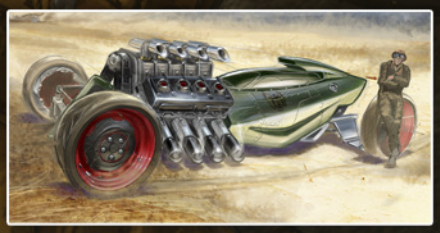












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Chapter 01: Medieval
Chapter 02: Roman
Chapter 03: Samurai

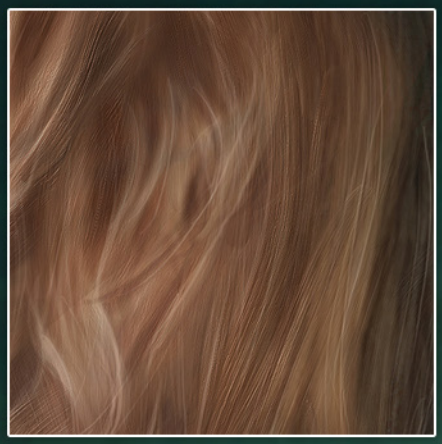
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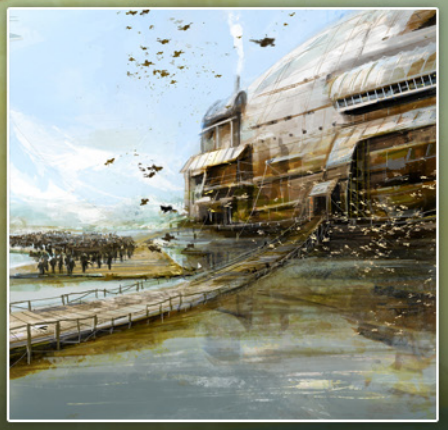
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